
Agency Information

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Document Information

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FROM :
TO :

TITLE : TAPE OF ROBERT MC NAMARA AND GENERAL TAYLOR

DATE : 00/00/1975
PAGES : 3

SUBJECTS :

TAYLOR, MAXWELL
OPERATION MONGOOSE
MIAMI
MC NAMARA, ROBERT
KENNEDY, ROBERT
EXECUTIVE ACTION CAPABILITY
ANTI-CASTRO ACTIVITIES
CUBAN EXILES
CIA
BURKE, ARLEIGH
BUNDY, MC GEORGE
BAY OF PIGS
ASSASSINATIONS, FOREIGN LEADERS
DULLES, ALLEN

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COMMISSION ON CIA ACTIVITIES WITHIN THE UNITED STATES

Washington, DC 20500

April 15, 1975

MEMORANDUM

TO : The File
FROM : David W. Belin
SUBJECT : Interview with Secretary Robert McNamara

Belin: Secretary McNamara, we've had a brief interview in your office on - late this afternoon - which is April 15, 1975, and I have asked you a number of questions and you have given me your best recollection for your answers, and I'd like to get a summary of our discussion on this tape and then send you a transcript for your editing, and then we will either prepare an affidavit or perhaps we will still ask you to come before the Commission, but I understand it is your preference not to testify formally before the Commission, because of the nature of your present job. Is that correct?

McNamara: That is correct. I wish to cooperate with the Commission in every way. If necessary, of course, I would testify before them, but I would much prefer to present whatever information I have in the form of an affidavit.

B: Fine. During the Administration of President Kennedy, you were Secretary of Defense. Is that correct?

M: That is correct.

B: And were you Secretary of Defense commencing at the time of the inauguration of President Kennedy?

M: Yes. Starting January 20, 1961.

B: And you were Secretary of Defense throughout the Kennedy Administration. Is that right?

M: I was.

B: --and into the Administration of Lyndon Johnson.

M: until approximately March 1, 1968.

B: During that time you were personally close with both the President and his brother, Robert Kennedy, is that correct?

M: I was.

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2 Dictabelts and 1 Tape:
178-10004-10393

2 Transcripts:
178-10002-10327; 178-10002-10337

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B: And you also were close to McGeorge Bundy?

M: Yes.

B: As I understand it there was what I am going to call a "camaderie" in the relationship among some of the top people in the Kennedy Administration.

M: Yes. That is correct.

B: At any time during the Kennedy Administration did you hear any person ever discuss a plan known as an "executive action plan" which in substance was defined as a capability plan for possibly assassinating any foreign leader?

M: I have no recollection of/hearing anyone discuss such a plan.

B: Did you ever hear anyone discuss any particular plan concerning the possible assassination of Castro in Cuba?

M: No. I have no recollection of such a discussion.

B: Did you ever serve in any group known as either the MONGOOSE group or the Special Group Augmented? Does that ring a bell with you?

M: No. You mentioned, if I may refer back to our ^{at} previous conversation, that I was present at least one or more meetings of the Special Operations Group, I believe you called it. I have no recollection of being present at the meeting. I'm not suggesting I wasn't, but I have no recollection of it. I do seem to recall that there was such a group, I doubt very much if I was a member of it.

B: You might have been a participant at one or more of these meetings?

M: I might have been a participant.

B: At any such meetings, did you ever hear anyone discuss as a possibility the question of possibly assassinating Castro or any other foreign leader?

M: No. I should interject here another point I made earlier, as I have no notes -- I did not take notes of any meetings I attended with rare exceptions, and I have no other basis for refreshing my memory and my memory of those

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years is very bad. I'm not saying this to in any way qualify what I am saying except that it is a fact that my memory is poor in relation to the period.

B: I asked you whether or not Robert Kennedy ever had any such discussions with you and you indicated no, is that correct?

M: --indicated two things. First that I have no recollection whatsoever of him ever having discussed assassination of anybody with me--or whatever you called it--the executive --

B: executive action capability --

M: executive action capability. Moreover, it is inconceivable to me that he would have discussed such an action with me because I think he would have felt that it endangered the Presidency and I believe he would have had moral reasons for not supporting any such action by the Government of the United States, ~~and~~ I base both of those points on my appraisal of his evaluation of the Bay of Pigs and the extent to which it weakened the presidency and the ability of the President to govern and his behavior during the Cuban missile crisis when he strongly opposed action which he considered contrary to the moral traditions of this society.

B: Do you have any other comments with regard to this whole question of possibly assassinating foreign leaders?

M: You told me that you understand a plan to assassinate one or more foreign leaders was in existence for an extended period of time, during 1961-2-3. I said (a) I have no recollection of any such plan, (b) I find it very difficult to believe that if such a plan had existed its existence wouldn't have been known to the top officials of the CIA, and certainly if I had known of it I am positive I would have made my knowledge known to the President, Robert Kennedy, neither of whom obviously can testify now, ~~but~~ to Mac Bundy, to my deputy, Ros Gilpatric, and probably to Dean Rusk, ~~and~~ I would strongly urge that you check those three individuals. In addition, Max Taylor was very close to Robert Kennedy at the time. He was brought in by President Kennedy to examine the decision-making process of the Government that could have led to such a failure as the Bay of Pigs. He was very--Max was very close to both Robert Kennedy and the President at the time. He was very close to the whole

LSW

problem of Cuban relations. He played a major part in the Cuban missile crisis discussions because of his association with the Kennedys and his work with the Bay of Pigs follow-on. So I would urge you to talk to him about this as well. And if Mac didn't know about it, and Max doesn't know about it and Dean Rusk doesn't and Ros (Rilpatrick doesn't and I have no memory of it, I very much doubt that any such plan was known to the top officials of the Kennedy Administration.

B: Well, assume for the moment that one of those people did know about such a plan, and assume for the moment that the CIA documents show that such a plan might have been directed to be instituted by someone in the White House, who in the White House do you think would have had the authority to institute such a plan?

M: Well, I have said before that I felt the attacks on the CIA -- CIA's covert operations, were unjustified insofar as they assessed the primary responsibilities for those operations against the senior officials in CIA and absolve the rest of the senior officials in the Government of responsibility. I said that because it was my experience that all major CIA operations were approved by a group that subsequently became known as the 303 Group. I don't know what it was called during its early period, which included representatives of the -- the highest level representatives -- of the Secretaries of State and Defense, as well as the President's Security Adviser.

B: That was Mr. Bundy.

M: That was Mr. Bundy, during the period you are talking about, ~~so that~~ I am almost certain that were an assassination contemplated, which seems to me, as I say, extremely unlikely, if it were contemplated or any action ~~been~~ taken to move in that direction, it would have had to have received the approval of not just Mr. Bundy but other officials at that same level, including my Deputy, I think, and my Deputy never would have approved anything like that without discussing it with me.

B: What you are saying--at least if it came through the White House, certainly Mr. Bundy would have known about it.

M: I think he would have both known about it, and I don't believe that he would have approved it by himself. I think it would have been discussed with Dean Rusk and me or my deputy and Dean Rusk's undersecretary.

B: And if Mr. Bundy did not know about it, then the only other person in the White House that might have known about it, I assume, would have been the President. Is that a fair statement?

M: That's a fair statement but I think that's extremely unlikely. I can't imagine that anything relating to the CIA operation of this kind would be known to the President and not Mr. Bundy. I never knew of any such thing.

B: So if it would have been known to Mr. Bundy it would have been known to the President. And vice versa?

M: No, nono. I didn't say that. I said I couldn't imagine anything relating to a CIA operation that was known to the President and was not known to Mr. Bundy. I can imagine something with respect to CIA known to Mr. Bundy, not known to the President either because they weren't that important or conceivably because it was thought desirable to protect the President from certain knowledge.

B: With regard to the --

M: If I may -- add one word to that. I can't imagine Mr. Bundy himself supporting assassination. I can't imagine him supporting assassination of a foreign leader, without mentioning it to the President, even though to do so would by that action involve the President. I say I can't imagine him supporting assassination of a foreign leader without the President's knowledge because it is the President who would pay if that action were undertaken and it ever became known. Mr. Bundy recognized, more than the rest of us, the importance of protecting the Presidency as well as a particular president, and particularly protecting his ability to govern.

B: I want to correct one thing on the record. You referred to my statement about one or more assassination plans. The only particular plan of assassination that you and I discussed that I said I knew anything about as to be concrete affirmative plans involved just Castro. I said there might have been indirect involvement in one other area, but the only direct involvement thus far that I know of at this time and that I discussed with you pertained to Castro.

M: Yes, yes, you are quite right.

Encl

B: Anything else you want to add for the record?

M: No, except I'm horrified by the whole discussion, shocked by it and I just hope you will pursue all these leads some of which you may already have--I am saddened by it too.

B: As a citizen I am horrified by it and I am saddened by it, that my country which at one time became the land of the free and the home of the brave would be involved in situations of this kind, but we are trying to find out what the facts are and hopefully it will not happen again.

Thank you very much, Sir.

M: Thank you.

(END OF TAPE)

Robert S. McNamee
signed 3/2/75

COMMISSION ON CIA ACTIVITIES WITHIN THE UNITED STATES

Washington, DC 20500

MEMORANDUM

TO : The File

FROM : David W. Belin

SUBJECT : Interview with General Maxwell Taylor

Belin: General Taylor, we're here on the 16th day of May 1975 at the offices of the CIA Commission in Washington and I have had an opportunity to review with you certain matters relating to your participation during the Kennedy Administration in matters involving Cuba, and I've asked you a number of questions and we've talked informally and now what I would like to do is to have it in question and answer form. Is that correct?

Taylor: Right.

B: All right. First of all, you might tell me when you came down to Washington to first serve with the Kennedy Administration in 1961.

T: I came down at the end of April at the invitation of the President to chair a group of four in the investigation of the Bay of Pigs--to analyze the causes of its failure and why it failed and whatever lessons that we decided the President--should be called to the President's attention. My colleagues were Bob Kennedy, Allen Dulles and Arleigh Burke. We worked on that report from the--the end--through the end of April and May--as I recall they got a final report to the President somewhat after the middle of June.

B: All right. If we can stop this tape a minute, I think I have a document upstairs which will give us the exact date which it was done. So I'm going to stop the tape now and check to see if it's recording and then I'll be right back down.

I'm going to continue now, General Taylor, and according to the notes I have you report--your memory is very good, by the way, for events that took place nearly fourteen years ago--your report was dated June 13, 1961 by way of a letter sent to President Kennedy, and it refers to an April 22, 1961 letter from President Kennedy to you directing you, together with Robert Kennedy, Admiral Arley Burke, and Allen Dulles as Director of

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Central Intelligence, to undertake a study with regard to the Bay of Pigs, and also certain recommendations. According to this document, President-elect Kennedy--or President Kennedy--first learned about the existence of plans for the overthrow of the Castro Government because of the call on him at Palm Beach by Allen Dulles and Richard Bissell, who was the Deputy Director of Plans of the CIA and who had overall coordinating supervision of the Bay of Pigs operation, and according to your--the document that you prepared which I assume was based upon your study of the facts, that the first formal briefing of President Kennedy was on January 28, 1961 with Vice President Lyndon Johnson, the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Defense, Director of Central Intelligence, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and others present at that briefing. Does that sound like perhaps it might be accurate so far as to what the events were?

T: It sounds correct. Obviously I don't recall specifically the details you mentioned.

B: I also noted that one section which I happened to note had language along the lines of this. It said "We also feel that the occasion offers the President the opportunity to express to his principal assistants and advisers his sense of the need of a changed attitude on the part of the Government and of the people toward the emergency which confronts us. The first requirement of such a change is to recognize that we are in a life-death struggle which we may be losing and will lose unless we change our way and marshal our resources with an intensity--(I can't read my own writing here)--intensity associated in the past^{on} in times of war." And then the remaining part of the paragraph it said the Director of Central Intelligence had not participated in it says "To effect this change we must give immediate consideration to taking such measures as announcement of a limited national emergency, the review of any treaties or international agreements which restrain the full use of our resources in the cold war and the determination to seek the respect of our neighbors without the criterion of international popularity and the policy being taken into account the proportioning of foreign aid to the attitudes shown us by our neighbors. In the light of the strained situation in Laos and the potential crisis building up over Berlin, we should consider at once affirmative programs to cope with the threat in both areas. I don't know if you remember that that might have been part of it at all or not?

T: Well, yes. Again, I don't recall the specific language, but I would say that was rather consistent with our frame of mind. This was not the height--at least one of the high points--in the Cold War and the Khrushchev threat on Berlin was very much on our minds, the question of whether Castro and the

activities in the Caribbean were related in any way to the pressure being placed on Berlin. All these things were in our mind, plus the fact that we had demonstrated in the Bay of Pigs operations that here in Washington we just had never thought through the problem of utilizing resources from numer--several departments for purposes such as this--the Cold War purposes.

B: Now, during the time that you prepared this paper, were you aware of any assassination plots against the lives of Castro or anyone else that might have been undertaken by the CIA?

T: I was not.

B: Were you ever aware of the existence of any plans to assassinate Castro?

T: I was not.

B: Did you ever have any discussions with either the President or the Attorney General or the Director of Central Intelligence, concerning the possibility or the existence of plans to assassinate Castro--either the possibility or the existence?

T: Certainly not with the President. Now in the case of Bob Kennedy and Allen Dulles we talked about so many things during the Bay of Pigs as one sits around the table, I couldn't say that--that the desirability of the disappearance of Castro or what would happen if he were assassinated in Cuba--that was not raised, I don't recall.

B: You don't recall any specific conversation one way or the other?

T: No.

B: Did you ever have any conversations with McGeorge Bundy or Walt Rostow about it?

T: No. None of those officials. Again, under the same terms as I indicated in the case of Bob and Allen Dulles, that they -- in the course of the daily work, we see men constantly and you're thinking so much about the Cuba problem, I couldn't say that assassination in the abstract--"Wouldn't it be a nice thing if someone bumped Castro off"--that could well have been said, but I just don't recall it.

B: Do you recall the existence of any approval to have the CIA undertake such a --

T: Never!

B: Did you ever hear the phrase "executive action capability" which was defined as a standby capability of assassinating foreign leaders. Did you ever hear

T: --that's a code phrase, meaning like you indicate?

B: Well, a phrase called and which refers to the capability of assassinating foreign leaders?

T: No.

B: Now, you also told me that you attended a meeting of the Special Group (Augmented) that occurred on or about August 10, 1962 at the Department of State.

T: I assumed that I did. I don't specifically remember that date or what the agenda might be, but by looking at the documents you have shown me I was the Chairman of the Mongoose aspect of the Special Group and I assume I was there.

B: General Lansdale worked with you?

T: He did.

B: In what capacity?

T: He was in charge of putting together a feasible programs --program or programs--which would include ways and means of restraining Castro. We were very much concerned whether in the ebullience of victory at the Bay of Pigs he might not intensify a campaign already begun as a matter of fact, to infiltrate agents in Latin America, as the saying was, to export Communism to Latin America, so we were thinking of ways and means and programs that might be devised to prevent that.

B: Do you have any recollection of what might have been said at a meeting that might have occurred in August of 1962?

T: No. I couldn't recall any specific meeting. If you had the minutes or something I'm sure it might suggest
--

B: Do you have any recollection as to whether or not someone at that meeting might have raised the possibility of the liquidation of Castro?

T: Well, as you say, it might have possibly occurred, it might possibly have occurred, but if it did, I don't recall it.

B: Do you recall any conversations that might have occurred at any such meeting?

T: No. Again with the minutes, if you have them, I'm sure may stimulate my memory.

B: How long did you stay in Washington in your service with the Kennedy Administration?

T: Well I stayed in the White House as the Military Representative of the President in which capacity I was generally his alter ego if you will for military and intelligence matters. On October 1, 1962 he designated me to become Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and moved out of the White House and gave up the White House-related position.

B: You took over from General Lemnitzer?

T: Yes.

B: And then you remained as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of staff until when?

T: Until July 1964 when I went to Vietnam as Ambassador.

B: Do you have any information that you think might in any way be relevant to the investigation of this Commission so far as possible unlawful domestic activities of the CIA is concerned?

T: No, I really don't, except as I mentioned to you before we started to tape this that there was a mass of Cubans in the United States based generally in the Miami area who certainly had many of them there who would like to see Castro dead and would be--would have been very happy to collaborate with getting him that way. Whether or not, conceivably low-level CIA agents, as is sometimes the case, overzealous subordinates ever encouraged any or talked to them or made any propositions to them, I don't know, but clearly it's a possibility. But I certainly never saw anything in my relations with the senior CIA officials to suggest that they this as a proposition, as something they were recommending or supporting or advising the President to do.

B: Anything else you can think of that might be relevant?

T: No, I don't think--I don't.

B: Any information that you think might be relevant so far as the assassination of President Kennedy is concerned that you don't think is public information now.

T: No. Absolutely nothing on it.

B: Well, we thank you very much for coming down. If you want--if we want to send a copy of the transcript to you for you to see and perhaps initial, to where should we mail it?

T: 2500 Massachusetts Ave., N.W., Apartment 1.

B: And is there a zip code on that?

T: 20008

B: And do you have a phone number there?

T: 483-5050.

B: All right. And thank you very much for your cooperation, Sir, and I had better check to see if this actually recorded here.

(END OF TAPE)